aware of the presence of touts or, unauthorised agents outside some passport offices. However, it is not true that the officers working in passport offices are helpless because of the presence of touts. Investigations so far have not established any direct linkage between these unauthorised agents and employees of Passport Offices.

(c) to (e) The Passport Officer and other officers go on rounds of the Passport Office premises to check the presence of touts or unauthorised agents. To eliminate the menace of unauthorised agents or touts, recognised travel agents have been authorised to submit applications for passport related services. In addition, facilitation counters have been introduced in some passport offices where Ex-Servicemen's Associations have been permitted to assist applicants in filling of passport applications at nominal fee. Police Authorities have also been approached to curb the activities of such touts/unauthorised agents.

The Government have introduced wide ranging reforms including decentralisation of acceptance of passport applications at district level and selected Speed Post Centres. These reforms will curb the activities of touts.

Joint Meeting of Permanent Indus Commission

230. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether a joint meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) constituted under the Indus Waters Treaty Act, 1960 was held in New Delhi, recently;

(b) if so, the issues taken up and the decision arrived at in the aforesaid meeting;

(c) whether there was any pressure exercised on Government from any quarter including the Government of Jammu and Kashmir to abrogate the provisions of Indus Waters Treaty Act in view of Pakistan's continued refusal to curb cross border terrorism against India; and

(d) if so, Government's reaction thereto ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH) : (a) Yes. Sir. The joint meeting of Permanent Indus Commission was held from May 28 to June 1. 2002 in New Delhi.

(b) Apart from the regular exchange of information as required under the treaty, the important issues that were discussed by the commission included issues pertaining to the transmission of flood data to Pakistan and the design of the Baglihar hydro-electric plant.

(c) and (d) There have been suggestions including in the Press that India should consider abrogating the Indus Waters Treaty in view of Pakistan's sponsorship of terrorism directed against India in violation of international law and bilateral agreements. Government have taken appropriate diplomatic and other measures to effectively defeat the menace of cross border terrorism. Pakistan has now made a commitment to stop cross border infiltration on a permanent basis, not to allow the territory of Pakistan to be used for terrorism anywhere in the world, or any organisation in Pakistan to indulge in terrorism in the name of Kashmir.

Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty

231. DR. KARAN SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn towards the Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty signed between the U.S. and Russia to prevent proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and

(b) if so, the terms of the treaty and Government's assessment about its effectiveness to prevent such proliferation and eliminating the risk to global peace and security ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH) . (a) Yes, Sir. President Putin and President Bush concluded the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty and the